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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000912

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SUBJECT: LIKELY REACTIONS TO UNAMI'S DIBS REPORTS AND
MANAGING THEM

Classified By: PolMinCouns Robert Ford: Reasons 1.4 (b and d).

11. (C) Summary: Likely reactions to the release by UNAMI of its reports on the Disputed Internal Boundaries (DIBs) areas in mid-April, absent diplomatic intervention by us, will range from public outrage to suspicious dismissal to private relief. In our recent, very light conversations with Kurdish, Shia and Sunni Arab political figures in Baghdad about the DIBs reports, we have found none who have focused much on how to use the reports to best advantage. We may not see an immediate reaction. It is likely that as they digest the reports, Kurdish leaders will be angry at UNAMI and bitter about perceived lack of U.S. support. It is possible they could react by encouraging public demonstrations and making destabilizing Peshmerga movements, although the first official Kurdish reaction might be a rejection of a continued UNAMI role. By contrast, PM Maliki likely will be relieved the reports do not suggest incorporation into the KRG of some of the most sensitive DIBs areas -- including Kirkuk, Khanaqin, and Sinjar. He may use the opportunity to take the high road in contrast to Kurdish anger, but his political interests lie in using the reports to harness popular Arab anger against Kurdish positions. Sunni Arab hardliners like incoming Ninewa Governor Alnujaifi may ignore calls for follow-on political dialogue or attach unacceptable conditions to their participation. Iraqi reactions are subject to our influence, however. Concerted diplomacy by UNAMI, the USG, and other diplomatic missions can help discourage provocative reactions, soothe tensions, and promote a political atmosphere conducive to peaceful negotiations. Political and security force confidence-building measures should be an important part of our diplomatic strategy. Interestingly, some of the tougher Kurdish and Sunni Arab politicians with whom we have raised DIBs reports have not rejected starting a negotiating process using the issuance of the DIBs reports as a launch point even if they haven't accepted the idea yet either. End summary.

12. (C) UNAMI plans to release its reports on the DIBs areas by April 15, initially to members of the Presidency Council and PM Maliki, then more broadly. The reports have been largely stripped of diplomatically phrased recommendations that UNAMI originally planned to include in 2008. Instead, the exhaustively researched reports generally will be confined to factual information, with a focus on each area's history, demography, economy, and administrative status. We expect UNAMI will recommend formal incorporation into the KRG of several less controversial DIBs areas that 1) are overwhelmingly Kurdish, 2) have long been administered by the KRG, and 3) lie north of the Green Line (and thus are areas on which the constitution already has conferred Kurdish authority). UNAMI will issue a single combined report on the four districts of Kirkuk Province, which will propose four options for a potential resolution of the province's status for consideration by a follow-on political process. The reports dealing with the two most contentious areas outside Kirkuk (Diyala's Khanaqin District and Ninewa's Sinjar District) highlight the political and administrative

difficulties in associating those areas with the KRG. That will make it unlikely the Kurds can successfully negotiate for the two territories, even though Khanaqin and Sinjar are Qfor the two territories, even though Khanaqin and Sinjar are overwhelmingly Kurdish-speaking areas (though religiously Faili and Yezidi, respectively), have been administered by the Kurds, and host populations that would support joining the KRG.

The Kurds: Public Outrage and Private Fuming, or Something More Destabilizing?

¶3. (C) We expect Kurdish Regional Government officials to react negatively, although it is not clear whether their reaction will be marked more by vituperative denunciations of the UN in the press or (more dangerously, in our opinion) grim private expressions of their determination not to engage in any UN-organized political negotiating process. The Kurds will feel they "get" little territory from the reports, except for areas like Akre that are not subject to serious dispute. They will see UNAMI's decision not to issue recommendations on the most sensitive areas as a concession to Prime Minister Maliki and Arab interests more generally (which it was), and they will denounce the reports for ignoring the clearly expressed desire of overwhelming majorities in several areas to join the KRG (which they do). What is not clear is whether the Kurds will use this to precipitate a crisis, either politically or militarily.

¶4. (C) Possible (although less likely, in our opinion) reactions include attempts to remove Maliki from power,

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refusal to engage further with UNAMI or any follow-on political process, augmenting Peshmerga units in selected DIBs areas, and calling on Kurdish soldiers to desert Iraqi Army units and return to the north. We think it more likely that Kurdish leaders, understanding their declining political and military strength, will fume in private, denounce the reports in public, berate the U.S. privately for betraying the interests of a longstanding ally, and organize rallies in the KRG and in selected DIBs in support of their territorial claims and opposing further UN involvement. The latter would be of particular concern, since Kurdish popular opinion will be if anything angrier than that of KRG officials. There is a risk of Kurdish mob violence against members of other ethnic groups or of bombing attacks targeting the Kurdish protests -- both of which we witnessed in July in Kirkuk city -- and such violence could in turn elevate the risk of direct conflict between IA units and Kurdish security forces.

The Prime Minister: Smug Satisfaction, or Something More Destabilizing?

¶5. (C) A public display of Kurdish anguish would give PM Maliki an opportunity to take the high road, but it is in his political interest to keep the pot simmering even as he calls for national unity. He will recognize that the UNAMI reports remove his three greatest strategic concerns concerning the Kurds: loss of control to the Kurds of Kirkuk and its hydrocarbons. With those apparently off the table, he may issue some qualified support for sections of the reports that recommend territorial transfers to the KRG (e.g., Acre, Sheikan, maybe Makhmour). We should expect him, however, to use the opportunity to remind voters of his support for limits on KRG autonomy and stress elements of the constitution (e.g., his role as commander-in-chief of all security forces, right of free movement of people, central government authority over hydrocarbons) that undercut Kurdish autonomy and power in the north. He may even commit himself and his government to participation in a UNAMI-organized follow-on political process, although any such public

declaration would probably be accompanied by a restatement of his redlines.

¶6. (C) More worrying, it is possible he could use the release of the reports as an opportunity to call for immediate removal of all Kurdish security forces from at least those DIBs areas that the UNAMI reports do not recommend go to the KRG. Such a public call would be itself politically provocative, more so if IA and IP commanders on the ground moved to implement the PM's order by trying to arrest and deport to the KRG Peshmerga and Assayish (Kurdish security police) found in areas like Khanaqin, Sinjar, and northern Kirkuk Province. Deployment of IA units into some of the DIBs areas (even those below the Green Line, but especially those above it, like Khanaqin) without consultation with the KRG could provoke fighting. The emotions aroused by release of the reports will be politically useful to Maliki as we approach national elections (if the emotions last), and we can expect him to continue to court parties (Hadba, Hewan/National Dialogue, Sadrists) that have successfully utilized anti-Kurd political platforms or are otherwise committed to rolling back Kurdish autonomy.

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Hardline Sunni Arabs: Dismissal, or Something More
Destabilizing?

¶7. (C) For some Sunni Arab politicians, such as Hadba's Atheel and Osama Alnujaifi and Hewan's Salih Mutlaq, any territorial acquisition by the KRG is too much. That is particularly true regarding DIBs areas in Ninewa, because every potential Kurdish gain (e.g. Sheikan, Faida sub-district in Tel Keif) is a loss of territory and influence for incoming governor Atheel Alnujaifi. Sunni Arab politicians largely ignored the release in June 2008 of UNAMI's first four preliminary DIBs reports and they may do the same in response to the release of the final reports. Public reactions by these leaders will likely be accompanied by claims that the process laid out in Article 140 of the constitution for adjudicating DIBs claims is dead and that no further territory should be attached to the three northern governorates of the KRG. Some may use harsher language to reject Kurdish political positions and criticize abuses by Kurdish security forces. It is not clear whether hardline Sunni Arabs are inclined to immediately reject a UNAMI-led process of political dialogue. Even if they agree to participate, their acceptance will likely be accompanied by

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demands that may not be acceptable to the Kurds, such as a demand that Kurdish security forces depart the DIBs until the negotiations process is completed.

The Role of U.S. and UNAMI: Full Engagement, or Something
More Destabilizing?

¶8. (C) Comment: It is very possible that the issuance of the reports will not generate much immediate reaction at all, since no Kurdish, Sunni Arab or Shia political leader we have met in Baghdad in recent days has evidenced having given any thought to how the reports might be used to best advantage. The Kurds are the ones most likely to react quickly since these territories are a more existential issue for them. It is possible that there will be some unhelpful rhetoric or acts on the ground that we will need to try to head off or at least contain. That said, Iraqi leaders will not make decisions regarding how to respond to the UNAMI reports independent of a cold-hearted calculus of their political interests. Thus, to a substantial extent, we can influence their public and private statements and actions, even if we cannot change their underlying views. Warnings by us and

UNAMI against destabilizing actions and comments, especially if tied to targeted incentives and disincentives, can safeguard the opportunity for dialogue and negotiation and avoid poisoning the atmosphere before talks even get started.

We plan to demarche all concerned parties on the need to respond to the UNAMI reports by pledging good faith commitment to peaceful resolution, but it is vital that UNAMI be prepared to talk in detail about the political process they will propose. So far, UNAMI has not indicated to us much detail about the follow-on political process. Also important will be engaging political leaders on implementation of confidence-building measures, some of which are identified in the UNAMI reports and some -- such as security force CBMs -- we will need to drive ourselves. Interestingly, some of the tougher Kurdish and Sunni Arab politicians with whom we have raised DIBs reports, such as Osama Alnujaifi and Fuad Massoum, have not rejected starting a negotiating process using the issuance of the DIBs reports as a launch point. End comment.

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